

TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Dr. Steve Matthews, Superintendent Novi Community Schools

DATE: October 19, 2011

Good morning.

I am the Superintendent of the Novi Community School District.

You have done many things that will help districts. You have passed a bill that requires us to reign in health care costs with a hard cap or an 80/20 split in premium costs. You have asked us to create an evaluation system that connects teacher and administrative performance with student growth. I thank you for those efforts.

Today, I come to speak with you about House bill 4671.

House Bill 4671 seeks to impose a salary cap on Superintendent salaries. This is a bill that superintendents are hesitant to speak about. We do not want to appear greedy or concerned more about our salaries than we are about the districts and the children that we serve.

Yet we are the ones who get called when a student brings a knife to school, when a student is caught with drugs, when there are 8 inches of snow on the ground. We are the ones who visit classrooms and work to create systems that will meet the needs of our students. We work long hours not because we have to but because we want to. We work behind the scenes to make sure our school systems are successful.

In my district I worked with our school board to create four district goals.

1. Every student will make no less than one year's growth in one year's time.
2. Every student will achieve at a high level – no achievement gaps.
3. We will evaluate and enhance opportunities for students while maintaining a 10% fund balance.
4. We will improve organizational quality and customer service by creating common standards, systems, and principles.

I have asked my board to hold me accountable for progress on these goals. I have outlined 25 specific objectives this year that will help us get closer to achieving these goals. I am not afraid of accountability or scrutiny.

I am in my 4th year as a superintendent. The men and women that I have met who serve as Superintendents in this state are good people. They have committed their professional lives to serving the children of this state. Now the state legislature comes along and threatens to impose a salary cap for what purpose?

I am not here to defend my salary. It is less than 3/100ths of the budget of my district. Reducing my salary would have no dramatic impact on my school district's budget. Reducing my salary 10,000,

20,000, 30,000, 40,000, or 50,000 dollars does not balance my district's budget. So I am not here to defend what I make.

In my mind, the effort to impose a salary cap is an effort in theatrics. In imposing this cap, I believe, the hope is that you will appear to be taking a stand to reign in the costs of schools. But it is a red herring. You are attempting to draw attention away from other issues that you have not addressed that would dramatically help schools.

Where could your time be more wisely spent? The public school employee retirement system. Next year the rate goes from 24% to 27%. That increase will cost my district over 1.3 million dollars. Reducing my salary will not impact this budget problem.

It appears that the state legislature will approve a high salary if my school district is failing and an emergency financial manager needs to be brought in or if the state wants to hire a superintendent for a select group of failing schools. Recent hires for those brought in to run schools or school districts that are failing range from \$250,000 a year to over \$350,000 a year in salary with other perks like a car or retirement annuities. Why is the state willing to pay the emergency financial managers positions well above what I make but my job in a successful, high performing, fiscally sound district needs to be cut?

Additionally, there seems to be no concern about for-profit schools coming into our state and making money. Why attack public servants who live in this state, pay taxes in this state, and have spent their professional lives dedicated to the children of this state when for-profit companies who stand to make significantly more than I make will have no restrictions imposed on them at all? Why – because this bill is for theatrics and not good policy.

Finally, why is the state telling local school boards how to manage their districts? If local school boards cannot be trusted with running their districts then you should end the pretense that these elected officials have any authority, consolidate the authority in the state legislature, and move forward.

I urge you to not waste your time with this bill. Spend what limited time you have on policies that would actually make an impact and not just make good theater.

Dr. Steve Matthews
Superintendent
Novi Community School District
25345 Taft Rd.
Novi, MI 48374
248-449-1204
smatthews@novi.k12.mi.us
Twitter: www.twitter.com/docsmatthews
Blog: www.novisuperintendent.blogspot.com